

# LAND

The land we live, work, and play on must be healthy if we are to be healthy. Environmental Health Services promotes the health of the people and communities of King County by protecting the land, through management of toxic materials, household and business hazardous waste, rodents and other pests, illegal drug labs, solid waste (garbage), and more.

**Hazardous waste:** Small businesses such as dry cleaners and autobody shops produce hazardous waste as part of their work processes, all of which needs to be identified, handled, and disposed of correctly. Households can also be burdened with hazardous waste like old paints, pesticides, and fertilizers. We help individuals and businesses identify the toxicity of their chemical wastes and determine where to safely and soundly dispose of them. We achieve this by partnering with the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program, a collaborative effort that also includes Seattle Public Utilities, King County Solid Waste, King County Water and Land Resources, and suburban cities. This partnership ensures the proper management of hazardous wastes produced by households and in small quantities by businesses.

**Illegal drug labs:** Law enforcement calls on Environmental Health to assess the scene at illegal drug labs. Our team posts signs at the scene indicating that the property is “potentially contaminated.” We conduct a visual survey of the myriad of chemicals and equipment used during the manufacturing process, all of which may have contaminated the walls, floors, ceilings, and other surfaces in and around a drug lab. Synthesizing information from police, laboratory, and other agencies, our team determines whether the property is contaminated or not. The owner of a contaminated property is then required to have it cleaned up. We guide the cleanup process and approve the property for re-occupancy.

**IMEX:** The Industrial Materials Exchange (IMEX) links individuals and businesses wanting to dispose of industrial materials with individuals and businesses that can use the materials. Both parties save money by avoiding both disposal and purchasing costs, and we all benefit by keeping excess materials out of the landfill. Since the inception of IMEX in 1990, businesses have saved a total of \$25,824,000 through 2645 exchanges of 8310 tons of materials.

**Garbage & rodents:** Environmental Health’s Solid Waste & Vector/Nuisance program reviews plans for waste-handling facilities, and monitors and inspects solid waste treatment sites, transfer stations, and landfill disposal sites to ensure that state and local solid waste codes are followed. We also investigate unlawful dumping complaints. Rodents and improper garbage disposal go hand-in-hand. If solid waste is not managed correctly, rodents will move right in.

Rodents destroy property, contaminate food supplies, and carry disease. They are one of the oldest public health problems known to humans. Rodents can be found where there is food and shelter for them, even in our neighborhoods. Our team responds to hundreds of rodent complaints each year and advises residents on how to remove food and habitat in order to make it difficult for rodents to survive.

**“We’re all playing a part to complete the puzzle of personal and community health. Realistically, more than just preventing disease, clean and healthy environments promote healthy communities and healthy lives.”**

*Teri Barclay, Health & Environmental Investigator,  
Solid Waste & Vector/Nuisance Program, 20 years*





**Roadside monitoring:** Our staff monitors soil and surface water for the three herbicides sprayed on King County roadsides in order to minimize any potential health risk. Through this sampling program, we were able to demonstrate that an 80% reduction in herbicide application still effectively manages vegetation, and is not harmful to health.

**Site hazard assessment:** Environmental Health assesses sites in King County that have been identified as contaminated by the Washington Department of Ecology. Our job is to determine the extent and severity of the contamination so the sites may be properly placed on Ecology's priority cleanup list.

**“Environmental Health is about giving people tools to make informed choices about their health.”**

*Olivia Chamberlain,  
Health & Environmental Investigator,  
Local Hazardous Waste Program, 13 years*

**Tacoma Smelter Plume:** The Tacoma Smelter Plume team tests soils for lead and arsenic and educates residents about soil contamination. Some King County soil was contaminated by air-borne arsenic and lead from the Tacoma copper smelter, which operated for almost 100 years before closing in the mid 1980s. The outreach team teaches parents, children, and childcare providers steps to reduce their exposure to contaminated soil, focusing on south King County, where the contamination is worse. In 2004, we plan to sample soils to define the "footprint" of contamination in King County, extending our sampling reach to north and east King County.



### **Program Highlight** **Duwamish Superfund Area**

The Duwamish River area has long been one of South Seattle's industrial cores, yet almost 5,000 people live in the river communities of South Park and Georgetown. Many local and regional people use the river for recreation. Along with the Washington State Department of Health, we educated residents about the health dangers of eating contaminated bottom fish

from the Duwamish. We also partnered with other environmental agencies to evaluate local businesses' storage and disposal practices in an effort to stop the discharge of hazardous waste into drains that empty into the river. Visits to businesses began in March of 2003 and should be completed by late 2004.

### **Quick Facts**

- Conducted 58 initial site hazard investigations and assessments
- Investigated 499 complaints on unlawful dumping
- Investigated 821 rodent complaints
- Responded to 19,220 household and 3,327 business inquiries regarding hazardous waste
- Responded to 111 illegal drug labs
- Advised over 1,000 dental offices on their hazardous materials, including mercury
- Saved businesses \$1,045,000 through 133 tons of IMEX exchanges
- Distributed 45,000 nail brushes, posters, and brochures in eight languages to remind our community how to reduce exposure to contaminated soil